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ABSTRACT

The major purposes of this study were (1) to collect evaluation information from parents concerning their perceptions of aspects of the Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFTP), and (2) to collect information from parents concerning their opinions of how the program may have affected their families and their relationship with their children's schools. Subjects were 50 low-income families whose children were enrolled in programs at two sites. The first community was composed predominantly of black families in an eastern urban setting, while the second community was composed of both black and white families in a southern rural setting. A telephone interview, consisting of 33 predominantly open-ended questions, was conducted by a PEFTP staff member trained in survey research techniques. In general, most parents perceived home visits and home learning activities as helpful and felt that the program had also helped their children do better in school. Responses concerning the effects of the program on the family were more diverse; at least half of the parents perceived no change in their family as a result of the program. Slightly over half of the parents thought they felt differently about themselves as a result of participating. Additional results are discussed. (RH)

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Parent Perspectives on Home-School Relationships in a Compensatory Elementary Education Program

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Running head: Parent Perspectives

Abstract

Little research has been done to look at the reactions that parents have had to compensatory elementary education programs. The purpose of this study was to find out from parents how their lives have been affected as a result of participation in the Parent Education Follow Through Program. Survey research was used for data collection. Findings are presented which include the areas of how parents feel about themselves, their interactions with their children, their relationships with the schools and school personnel, their views of classroom volunteering and home visits, and the ways in which their lives and families have changed.

Parent Perspectives on Home-School Relationships

in a Compensatory Education Program

How do parents feel about their involvement in a compensatory education program in which they are major participants? Do they perceive that the program has affected them and their families? Do they feel the program has affected their relationships with the school? These questions were the foci for a study recently conducted in conjunction with the Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFTP). The two major purposes of the study were: (1) to collect evaluation information from parents concerning their perceptions of various aspects of the PEFTP, and (2) to collect information from parents regarding their opinions of how the program may have affected their families and their relationship with the school.

Theoretical Framework

The interest in parent involvement over the past fifteen years has resulted in the development and operation of parent programs serving families with children of all ages. The most prevalent parent programs during this period have been those which have served families with children from birth through age eight, with many of these programs affiliated with federal education, health, and welfare projects. The basic assumption underlying these parent participation programs is that the behavior and attitudes of parents and other family members influence the child's behavior, attitudes, and learning. Evidence for this belief can be found in a number of research studies (e.g., Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfield, & York, 1966; Marjoribanks, 1979; Lazar & Darlington, Note 1).

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Two general reviews of parent participation programs have recently appeared in the literature. The first review, written by Henderson (1981), is an annotated bibliography of 35 parent participation program studies. In each study, parent involvement is found to be associated with gains in child performance. The second review, authored by Leler (in press) includes, among other studies, summaries of 48 educationally-oriented programs involving parents of school-age children. Of this total number, 40 studies (83%) report positive results concerning the relationship between parent participation and child learning. The combined findings of these two reviews present very strong evidence for a positive relationship between parent involvement and child outcomes.

One useful system for categorizing parent participation programs was developed by the late Ira J. Gordon (1979). In this system there are the following three types of programs. First, parent impact programs, in which parent participation generally involves parent education. In this model, the school (or other institution) provides the family with information and services through which, it is expected, the family will assist the child in becoming a more effective learner (Gordon, 1979).

The second program category consists of school impact programs in which families become active decision-makers in the area of school operations. The school (or other institution) becomes more responsive to the parents and their beliefs and values. Lay control of schools and legislation such as Public Law 94-142 could be considered as examples of the school impact model.

The final program category, the community impact model, includes programs in which there is active involvement in both directions between the school (or other instututution) and the home. Both families and teachers are perceived as having strengths and the resulting program combines these strengths to

maximize the learning environment for the child. In addition, other agencies (e.g., health, social services) are usually actively involved in programs of this category.

One program in this last category is the Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFTP) which was developed by Ira J. Gordon and his associates. In this program, families and school personnel work closely to combine the strengths of the home with the strengths of the school to provide the best learning environment for the children. This is accomplished through a variety of means including an emphasis on active parent participation, the utilization of the same specific teaching behaviors in both the home and classroom, and the provision of inservice training for both school personnel and parents.

Over the years, various evaluation procedures have been utilized to assess not only the level of implementation of the PEFTP, but also the impact of the program on various groups of participants (e.g., children, teachers, parents). The results have been very positive and have included such findings as: significant program effects on child achievement, diffusion of effects to younger siblings in program families, and increased use of the targeted teaching behaviors by program parents and a significant relationship between this usage and child achievement (Olmsted, Rubin, True & Revicki, 1980).

Due to the comprehensive nature of the PEFTP and the many ways in which families are involved in its operation, an evaluation study was undertaken to ascertain parents' perceptions regarding their participation in the program and to provide data concerning how parents perceived the effect that the program may have upon their families and their relationships with the school. The remainder of this paper will consist of a brief description of

the PEFTP, a discussion of the methodology of this evaluation study and a presentation of the findings.

The Parent Education Follow Through Program

The Parent Education Follow Through Program (PEFTP) operates both in the home and in the school. Parents and school instructional personnel are seen as key figures in a child's development and the program strives for a close working relationship among these key persons to maximize the program's impact on both parents and children. The principal features of the program include:

1. Home visits made by program parents employed as paid paraprofessionals. These persons, called parent educators, spend one-half of their time working as classroom instructional personnel and one-half of their time visiting the homes of children in the classroom. During these home visits, information bewteen home and school is exchanged, plans are made for the parent to volunteer in the classroom, and the previous home visit is reviewed. Also during each home visit, a home learning activity is shared with the parent which stresses specific teaching behaviors (see Figure 1). These home learning activities, developed by parents and staff, are generally related to activities in the classroom, but utilize home materials and family activities. The specific teaching behaviors stressed in the home are also stressed in the classroom.

2. Six parental participation roles including: teacher of own child, paid paraprofessional, decision maker through Policy Advisory Committees (PAC), adult learner, audience, and classroom volunteer. Each of these roles is considered important for effective program operation and parents often move among the various roles over time.

3. Comprehensive services for participating families, including social, psychological and health services. The services of local agencies are utilized whenever possible and program parents assist one another by babysitting or providing transportation to enable a family to utilize the services. In each community, a parent committee helps locate available services and serves as a program advocate to request specific types of service which might not be available (Olmsted, Rubin, Chapman & Revicki, Note 2).

This program was implemented in ten communities (8,000 children per year) around the country between 1969 and 1981 and is still in operation in eight of these ten communities (6,000 children per year). The program serves families

and their children in grades kindergarten through three. In each of the communities, the program is located primarily in schools serving children who have participated in Head Start or similar preschool programs. Approximately 80% of the families in the program fall below the specified federal income guidelines and qualify for comprehensive services. All families with children in classrooms designated as "PEFTP classrooms" are actively involved in the program, regardless of family income.

Figure 1

Desirable Teaching Behaviors

1. Before starting an activity, explain what you are going to do.
2. Before starting an activity, give the learner time to familiarize himself or herself with the materials.
3. Ask questions which have more than one correct answer.
4. Ask questions which require multiple word answers.
5. Encourage the learner to enlarge upon his or her answer.
6. Get the learner to ask questions.
7. Give the learner time to think about the problem; don't be too quick to help.
8. Get the learner to make judgments on the basis of evidence rather than by guessing.
9. Praise the learner when he or she does well or takes small steps in the right direction.
10. Let the learner know when his or her answer or work is wrong, but do so in a positive or neutral manner.

Methods

Subjects

The subjects for this study were 50 families whose income fell at or below the official poverty guideline established by the Office of Management and Budget and whose children were enrolled in the PEFTP in two program sites. Community A was composed of predominantly black families in an eastern urban setting, while the other community B was composed of both black and white families in a southern rural setting. In the former site, a random sampling procedure was used to select the subjects whereas in the latter site, a stratified random sampling procedure was utilized to insure that the ethnic composition of the sample accurately reflected the ethnic composition of the families participating in the program.

The determination of the sample size was based on both monetary and time constraints of the PEFTP sponsor organization. Of the original 25 subjects selected in Community A, 4 did not participate for the following reasons: for 1 parent, the timing was inconvenient, the work schedules made it difficult for another to participate, one parent moved and was no longer in the program, and one parent was ill and unable to participate. An additional 4 subjects were selected for interviewing from a random sample list of alternatives. Of the original 25 subjects in Community B, 16 were interviewed. The reasons given by 9 subjects in the original sample for not participating included: 5 were unable to be contacted after three repeated tries to interview them at the appointed times; 2 were not interested in participating; 1 had moved and was no longer in the program; and 1 had no access to a telephone. The additional 9 subjects interviewed were chosen from a stratified random sample list of alternatives.

Instrument

A telephone interview was utilized for the collection of data concerning parent perceptions of aspects of the PEFTP and how the PEFTP has affected their families and their relationships with the school. This data collection method was particularly appropriate for this study for the following four reasons: (1) several of the parents participating in the program cannot read or write and therefore could not complete a mail questionnaire; (2) neutral clarification questions could be asked if an answer was not appropriate; (3) a higher completion rate would be obtained with this method as opposed to mail questionnaires for this sample (i.e., fewer parents would need to be contacted in total); and (4) the cost involved was relatively low as compared to sending an interviewer to the sites. In addition, Dillman (1978) mentioned several other general factors which were considered when deciding to use a telephone interview as opposed to a mail survey. These included: (1) greater success in obtaining comprehensive answers to open-ended questions; (2) greater ability to controlthe sequencing with which answers are given to questions; (3) greater success in avoiding item non-response by using standardized probe questions; and (4) greater liklihood of avoiding joint discussions of answers by respondents.

The interview questionnaire consisted of 33 predominately open-ended questions which were developed by PEFTP sponsor staff. Questions pertaining to attitudes about the program and a variety of types of parent involvement were covered in the questionnaire. Finally, questions concerning the parents' perceptions of how the program may have affected their family or their relationship to the school were included.

In order to assess the accuracy of the self-report answers, three items were included in the interview for which responses could be checked against records kept by the local program staff as part of the evaluation data.

These three questions were:

1. How many years have you been in the Follow Through Program?

2. Have you or another family member attended any Follow Through Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) meetings this year? If so, how many have you attended?

3. Do you volunteer in _____'s classroom at school? If so, how many times have you volunteered in that room this year?

The decision was made to exclude from analysis any parent whose responses differed from the information contained in the local program files by the following amounts: (1) years in program = a difference greater than 1 year, (2) PAC attendance = a difference greater than 5 meetings, and (3) classroom volunteering = a difference greater than 3 instances. These decisions took into consideration the fact that many parents had children who were enrolled in other programs (e.g., Title I, Head Start) and it might be difficult for these parents to remember clearly how many PAC meetings they attended for different programs or how many times they had volunteered in the classroom for different programs.

Two types of pilot testing were done with the questionnaire before data collection was begun. First, the interview was administered to several PEFTP staff members not involved in its development. These interviews were audiotaped and later critiqued in relation to both the interviewer and the questions. The interviewer characteristics attended to included: (1) reading the questions exactly as they were written, (2) reacting to responses in a neutral, not positive or negative way, (3) using standard alternate wordings if a question was not understood, (4) using standard probe questions if the response was incomplete, and (5) using a tone of voice which was non-threatening and non-judgmental. The questions were evaluated in terms of their clarity and completeness. Few changes in wordings were made after these interviews.

The second pilot testing consisted of telephone interviews with four low-income parents in PEFTP communities other than the sites selected for the study. Each of these parents had been involved in the program for many years and had participated in other evaluation activities. At the completion of the interview, these four parents were asked the following: (1) was the interview too long or too short; (2) were any questions offensive; (3) did any questions constitute an invasion of their privacy; (4) were the language and terminology appropriate; and (5) were there any questions which should be added. These interviews were audiotaped and critiqued by the sponsor staff. At this point, a few more minor changes were made in the wording of some questions.

The interviews were conducted by a PEFTP program staff member who was also a graduate student at the University of North Carolina. This person was female and was trained in survey research techniques. The subjects were told that the interviewer was a student who was conducting a study to find out how they felt about the program.

Procedure

Before the study began, permission was obtained from both the coordinator and PAC chairperson in each of the two communities. The telephone questionnaire was then developed and the two samples of parents were drawn. Parents were initially contacted by the PAC chairperson who explained the purpose of the study and asked the parent when it would be convenient to call. These appointment times were then communicated to the interviewer in Chapel Hill who kept a schedule for the telephone calls.

The telephone interviews were conducted during April, May and June of 1981. The average length of the interviews was 20 minutes, with a range of 10 minutes to 60 minutes. Parents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality and were allowed to continue their responses as long as they wished. At the beginning

of the interview, the parents' permission was requested for audiotaping the conversation. In addition, written notes were made by the interviewer during the telephone interview. If the parent did not have a telephone, he or she was asked if there was a telephone at another location convenient to him or her. Besides the parent's home, interviews were conducted at the parent's place of work, at a neighbor's or relative's home, and in a private office at the local project headquarters. After each interview, a thank you letter was sent to each parent along with a stamped, addressed postcard in case they wished to make additional comments. No additional interview data were obtained from the few post cards which were returned.

Once the interviews were completed, data on the accuracy items were solicited from the local program staff in the two communities. The comparisons between the two sets of data resulted in the following number of major differences.

Accuracy Items	Elimination Criteria	Number of Parents Excluded	
		Community A	Community B
Years in Program	> 1	0	3**
PAC attendance	> 5	7	0
CR volunteering	> 3	NA*	3**

In community A all families were of black ethnicity and the 25 families had been selected by random sampling, so the exclusion of seven families should not have significantly altered any demographic variables of interest for the present study. In community B the group of 25 families had been selected using a stratified random sampling procedure to insure that the ethnic composition of the sample reflected that of the program population. The percentages of black and white families in the original and final samples are given in the following table.

* Due to data collection problems concerning classroom volunteering in Community A, this item could not be used.

** One family is represented in two of the three accuracy items. Therefore the total number of families removed in Community B is five.

Community B

	Original Sample		Excluded	Final Sample	
	N	%	N	N	%
Black	9	36	3	6	30
White	16	64	2	14	70
Total	25	100		20	100

As can be seen in the table, the ethnic composition of the final sample is close to that of the original sample and it can be concluded that the ethnic composition of the final sample is representative of the program population in community B. Of the final sample of subjects interviewed in Community A, all were mothers except one, a father. Of the final sample in Community B, all were mothers except one, a grandmother.

The final descriptive variable for the two groups of parents relates to the number of years each family in the final sample has participated in the program. These data are as follows:

Number of Years in PEFTP

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	TOTAL
Community A	3	6	4	3	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	18
Community B	5	4	5	1	1	1	1	-	-	1	1	-	20

It can be seen from these data that in both communities, the majority of families had participated for 4 years or less. Also, in both sites there were 2 families with 10 or more years of participation.

Data Analysis

Two major questions are being examined in the present study:

1. How do parents who have participated in the PEFTP perceive various aspects of the program?

2. How do parents who have participated in the PEFTP perceive that the program may have affected their family or their relationship with the school?

Four PEFTP sponsor staff members independently selected items which they felt pertained to these two questions. The ten items selected by either three or four persons constitute the data for this study.

The data analyses for these ten interview items will be predominantly descriptive. Wherever possible, tables listing frequencies of responses by categories will be presented. Sample responses relating to specific aspects of the program or its effects will be given to illustrate the actual nature of the responses. Finally, differences between the responses of the parents from the two communities will be noted and discussed when present.

Results and Discussion

Parents' perceptions of the program

Parents' perceptions concerning the program were explored with three questions. Each of these questions will be stated, followed by the general results for each community and by sample responses representing particular aspects.

1. DO YOU FIND THE HOME VISITS TO BE HELPFUL? HOW?

	Community A		Community B	
Responses	N	%	N	%
Yes	14	78	19	95
Not Really	1	6	1	5
No	1	6	-	-
No Answer	1	11	-	-
TOTAL	18	101	20	100

The majority of parents interviewed in both communities perceived the home visits to be helpful. The answers to the follow-up question (How?) were very diverse and reflect the many objectives of the home visits set by the program developers. One major purpose of the home visit is to facilitate communication between the home and the school. This aspect of the home visit

was noted by 9 parents in community A and 4 parents in community B. Sharing home learning activities is another major function of the home visit and was mentioned by 2 parents from community A and 7 parents from community B. Appreciation of the relationship with the parent educator was mentioned by 1 parent in site A and by 4 parents in site B. It is interesting to note that although the same aspects of the home visit were mentioned by parents from the two sites, the frequency with which they were mentioned differed in the two communities.

2. DO YOU THINK THE HOME LEARNING ACTIVITIES (HLAs) OR TASKS ARE HELPFUL TO YOU AND YOUR CHILD? CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF ONE THAT IS HELPFUL?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	16	89	18	90
Somewhat	-	-	2	10
No	2	11	-	-
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

The HLAs were perceived as helpful by nearly every parent interviewed in each of the two sites. Answers to the follow-up question exhibited variation in both the specificity and number of HLAs mentioned by parents. Examination of the HLAs noted as being helpful showed great similarity across the two sites. This similarity of helpful HLAs for the two sites is interesting in light of the finding that parents in the two sites differed in the aspects of the home visits which they found to be helpful.

3. DO YOU THINK FOLLOW THROUGH HAS HELPED _____ TO DO BETTER IN SCHOOL? IF SO, HOW?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	14	78	19	95
Maybe	-		1	5
No	3	17	-	
No answer	1	6	-	
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

The follow-up question yielded very different responses from the two groups of parents, which may reflect the individual 'personalities' of the PEFTP in the two sites. In community A the local program staff has stressed the whole child more than any particular aspect of the child's development, while in community B there has been more of an emphasis on academic achievement. The flexible nature of the PEFTP allows for these individual site variations and it is interesting to note that the responses given by the two groups of parents provide evidence that they perceive their programs in the same general way as the local program staff. Answers to the follow-up question given by at least two parents are presented in the following table:

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Enjoys school more	3	38	5	28*
Improved in Reading	-	-	6	33
Improved in Mathematics	-	-	4	22
Improved attitude	1	12	2	11
More outgoing	2	25	1	6
Doing more school work	2	25	-	-
	8	100	18	100

From this table it can be seen that in community B, 55% of the parents mentioned specific areas of academic work (Reading + Mathematics) in response to the follow-up question, while no parents (0%) in Community A, made this type of response.

Parents' Perceptions of How Program Has Affected Family and Relationships With the School

Family. Four interview items are related to this topic. Each item will be stated, followed by the results.

* Percentage based on total number of responses

1. HAS BEING IN FOLLOW THROUGH CHANGED YOUR FAMILY IN ANY WAY? IF SO, HOW IS THIS RELATED TO THE PROGRAM?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	5	28	8	40
Maybe	1	5	-	-
No	12	67	10	50
No response	-	-	2	10
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

It is important in examining these data to remember that there is a diversity among families within the socio-economic class included in this study along dimensions such as closeness with other family members, level of involvement in education of child, etc. Consequently, it was not anticipated that an extremely high proportion of parents would respond "Yes" to this item. What is of interest are the responses given to the follow-up portion of the question. Some families who answered "No" to the first question, indicated in response to the follow-up question that their family had always been close.

The follow-up responses for those parents who answered "Yes" to the initial item were more diverse. Specific responses given by more than one parent include: (1) closer to child, better communication with child, (2) spend more time with child, and (3) father is more involved in child's education. Two responses of interest given by one parent each are: (1) "Different activities the parent educator brings apply to all the kids and all benefit" which suggests that the parent is interacting with several children with the home learning activities, and (2) "More involved as a family in activities."

2. DO YOU ACT DIFFERENTLY WITH (child's name) NOW THAN BEFORE YOU CAME INTO THE PROGRAM? IN WHAT WAYS?

	Community A		Community B	
Responses	N	%	N	%
Yes	4	22	10	50
Somewhat	1	5	-	-
No	13	72	8	40
Don't Know	-		2	10
TOTAL	18	99	20	100

The small number of "Yes" responses for parents in community A is somewhat surprising. One of the main goals of the program is to encourage parents to utilize specific teaching behaviors with their children and we had hoped this emphasis would be reflected in the answers to this question (see Table 1). One interesting point is that in some PEFTP communities, observations of program parents interacting with their children have shown that these parents utilize significantly more of these specific teaching behaviors than a comparable group of non-program parents (Greenwood, Ware, Gordon, & Rhine, 1981; Olmsted, 1981). It is unclear why the responses in the present study do not indicate a greater awareness of the use of these specific teaching behaviors.

The responses to the follow-up question for parents from both communities who answered "Yes" to the initial question were similar. The more frequent responses included such comments as: closer to child, more patient with child, provides more explanations to child, and gives child more attention. One interesting response from a parent in community B stated "My attitude has changed when I see _____ looking forward to the tasks. She is proud of herself."

Although there is little evidence of it in the responses to this question, other data such as the studies mentioned earlier in this section lead us to believe there have been major changes in the way program parents interact with their children. Perhaps the open-ended interview question is not the best

way to inquire about this area of program impact:

3. DO YOU FEEL DIFFERENTLY ABOUT YOURSELF NOW AS A RESULT OF YOUR BEING IN FOLLOW THROUGH? IF SO, IN WHAT WAYS?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	7	39	10	50
Somewhat	2	11	2	10
No	9	50	8	40
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

Since the PEFTP program involves parents as major participants, we were interested in knowing whether or not parents felt differently about themselves after being involved in the program. Due to the random (or stratified random) sampling procedure utilized, we assumed that the parents being interviewed represented all degrees of program involvement and indeed the data from the accuracy responses confirmed this. Thus it is of interest to note that 50% of the parents in community A and 60% of the parents in community B reported at least some change (Yes + Somewhat) in their feelings about themselves.

The most frequent responses to the follow-up question were similar in the two communities and included: (1) feeling better about self, (2) feeling that they had better relationship with child, and (3) feeling that they know more about how to work with the child. Two responses of special note were given by parents in community A. The first was "I feel better. I feel like I have accomplished something. I understand _____ better and see him use his mind." The second was "I went back to school and am trying to get my GED. My dream is to go to college." (This parent stated her age as 53). These two responses illustrate the dramatic changes in the ways in which some parents feel differently about themselves and indicate the degree of impact a program like the PEFTP can have with some parents.

4. HAVE YOU LEARNED ANYTHING NEW AS A RESULT OF YOUR BEING IN THE FOLLOW THROUGH PROGRAM? CAN YOU GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	14	78	15	75
No	4	22	5	25
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

In both communities, at least 75% of the parents indicated they had learned something new as a result of their participation in the program. Of the six major types of parent involvement stressed by the program, responses were given in the following four categories: teacher of own child, adult learner, classroom volunteer and decision-maker.

Especially interesting were the areas of new learning mentioned by the parents. In community A, one mother noted that she had learned the multiplication tables while another mentioned spelling. In community B, one parent indicated that she had learned new math while two others generally said they learned things from the tasks delivered by the parent educator.

Other types of responses given included: (1) learning about the school, (2) learning new ways to work with their children, and (3) learning how to utilize community resources.

Relationships with the school. There are three interview items related to this area. The first item is:

1. DO YOU FEEL WELCOME AT _____'S SCHOOL? WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL WELCOME OR UNWELCOME? IS IT A RESULT OF YOUR BEING IN FOLLOW THROUGH?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	18	100	18	90
No	-	-	-	-
Yes and No	-	-	2	10
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

The overwhelmingly positive responses to the first part of this item were a pleasant surprise. Much has been written about the poor relationship which exists between low-income parents and the public schools, about how each blames the other for educational problems the child may have, and about how the school personnel look down upon the parents and feel they have little interest in their child's education. Building a strong, positive relationship between the home and school has been a major objective of the PEFTP and efforts toward this end have included working with both school personnel and parents. Consequently, it is rewarding to see that parents perceive that they feel welcome at their child's school. The two Yes/No answers were given by parents who had mixed experiences in the school. For example, one parent's comment was, "If I can make it past the principal's office, the PE makes me feel welcome."

The responses to the second part of this interview item were similar for both communities. Four parents in each site mentioned the principal, while 8 parents in each site mentioned the teacher. Less frequent answers included: the children, everyone, and the parent educators. Two parents in community B said that they felt that everyone was treated the same at the school regardless of their income. The fact that they made this comment may mean that these parents had expected to be treated as "less-than-equals."

The third section of this item yielded puzzling responses. In both communities only approximately half of the parents felt that the feeling of being welcome in the school was related to being in the Follow Through program. Possible explanations for this low percentage of positive responses includes: (1) the fact that many of the families interviewed have only had children in Follow Through and consequently have had no comparison experience and (2) there are some other programs and schools that make a strong effort to help parents

feel comfortable.

In addition to the interview item about the school, the following item relating to the classroom was included in the telephone questionnaire.

2. DO YOU THINK YOUR WORK IN THE CLASSROOM IS HELPFUL TO THE CHILDREN? COULD YOU GIVE ME A SPECIFIC EXAMPLE OF AN ACTIVITY THAT IS MOST HELPFUL? WHAT ACTIVITIES THAT YOU DO ARE LEAST HELPFUL TO THE CHILDREN?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Yes	15	83	1	5
Maybe	-		1	5
No	1	5	-	
No Answer*	2	11	18	90
TOTAL	18	99	20	100

The pattern of responses reflects the different levels of emphasis placed on classroom volunteering by the two communities. An extremely strong effort to have parents continually and actively involved in the classroom is a major part of the PEFTP in community A. In each school in this site, several parents have regular volunteer hours each week during which they carry out specific instructional activities with specific children. In community B other elements of the program are given greater emphasis. Also, in site B, transportation for parents to get to school to volunteer is more difficult than it is in site A where most parents can walk to the building.

The responses from community A concerning parent volunteer activities which were most useful were very diverse. Reading stories was mentioned by three parents while each of the following was mentioned by two parents: singing, general help with work, and praising. Other activities mentioned included helping individual children, grading papers, handcrafts, and giving children a chance to express themselves. No activities were listed in response

*Parents who either did not volunteer in the classroom or did so only very infrequently were not asked this question.

to the part of the item concerning least helpful activities.

The final question relating to the relationship between the home and the school concerned the relative contributions of each to the child's education.

3. WHICH DO YOU THINK IS MORE IMPORTANT FOR YOUR CHILD'S EDUCATION: WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES, WHAT YOU DO, OR ARE THEY OF EQUAL IMPORTANCE?

	Community A		Community B	
Response	N	%	N	%
Equal	14	78	17	85
School	3	17	2	10
Home	1	5	1	5
TOTAL	18	100	20	100

One assertion of the PEFTP is that a strong, cooperative working relationship between the home educational environment and the school educational environment provides the optimum learning environment for the child. The responses to this interview item would suggest that parents in both communities agree with this assertion. Although no baseline data are available for these parents, the general literature would suggest that many parents, particularly low-income parents, feel that education is basically the business of the school. Some parents often do not perceive of themselves as "teachers" of their own children or as major figures in their child's education. Therefore, we feel the responses to this question may suggest a changing trend, one in which parents more clearly perceive the important role they play in their child's education; and even further, the importance of both the home and the school as key elements in the educational process.

Summary and Conclusions

The interview responses presented in this paper provided interesting and useful information about how parents perceive the PEFTP and its effects

on their family and their relationship with the school. In general, most parents perceived the home visits and the home learning activities as helpful, and felt that the program had helped their child do better in school.

The responses concerning the effects of the program on the family were more diverse and may reflect an interaction between the program and the variety of types of families which are present within the group classified as "low-income." At least half of the parents in each community perceived that there had been no changes in their family as a result of the program and some of these elaborated on their responses by noting that "the family has always been close." For those parents who did perceive a change in the family, the responses generally indicated that the family became closer or that the family spent more time together. Only a moderate proportion of the parents felt they acted differently with their children as a result of participation in the program, which was surprising since direct observation data collected by the program suggested that changes in these behaviors were greater than the data from this study would indicate. It is possible that the wording of the interview question was too vague.

Slightly over one-half of the parents gave positive responses to the item asking if they felt differently about themselves as a result of participating in the program, with self-esteem and relationship with children being the two major types of responses. Most parents perceived that they had learned new things by participating in the program. The content of the responses to this question fell into four of the six categories of parent involvement stressed by the program and also indicated that in many cases the parent, as well as the child, was gaining new knowledge and skills from the home learning activities.

Nearly all parents felt welcome in the school, but only half perceived

this to be related to the program. In the one community in which parental classroom volunteering is stressed, parents perceived their work in the classroom as helpful and gave a wide variety of responses when asked for an example of a helpful activity. Finally, most parents felt that the home and the school were equally important to the child's education.

The PEFTP program is a "process" program with many components. Although each community implementing it meets established criterion levels in each program area, each community also stresses some components more heavily than others which results in individual community program 'profiles.' Evidence of these community differences could be seen clearly in the responses in two interview items; the one concerning how the child has been helped in school and the one relating to parental classroom volunteering. We see these community differences as positive and feel that the flexibility within the structure of the model strengthens the program by allowing for individual implementations which best fit each community.

For nearly every interview item, the responses ranged from positive to negative. This indicated to us that, at least to some degree, the parents were not just telling us "what we wanted to hear." After listening to many of the audiotaped interviews, it seemed to us that the parents were trying to respond honestly to our questions. Evidence for this can be seen in the content and variety of responses given to the follow-up questions. Also, the PEFTP has an excellent record of maintaining confidentiality in studies of this type and this was mentioned to the parent by the PAC chairperson when the initial contact was made to explain the study and to set-up an appointment.

These results have provided important information concerning parents' perceptions about the program. Data collection of this nature is especially useful to a parent involvement program and these data have filled a gap in

the comprehensive evaluation done by the program staff. In addition, these data provide evidence that the parents perceive strong positive relationships between home and school and many parents perceive changes in themselves and their families. This is one of the first studies which has explored parent perceptions of this nature and we feel that the data have yielded some extremely useful information not only for this program, but also for other parent involvement programs.

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